

Coalition on Smoking OR Health

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PUBLIC COMMENT OF THE COALITION ON SMOKING OR HEALTH

AMERICAN LUNG ASSOCIATION
AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION
AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

FRAN DU MELLE, CHAIRPERSON

Before the Interagency Committee on Smoking and Health
National Advisory Committee
"Preventing the Sale of Tobacco to Minors"
May 31, 1990



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Good afternoon. I am Fran Du Melle, Chairperson of the Coalition on Smoking OR Health and Director of Government Relations for the American Lung Association. The Coalition is made up of the three largest voluntary health organizations in this country: the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society, and the American Lung Association. We appreciate the Committee's holding of this meeting concerning the need to prevent minors' access to tobacco products, and we are glad to welcome our nation's new Surgeon General, Dr. Antonia Novello, into the fray.

The easy access that our nation's children have to cigarettes and smokeless tobacco is a crisis of dramatic proportions, demanding a dramatic and effective response from the federal government, as well as from state and local governments. As the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services reported recently, the laws in existence in 44 states and the District of Columbia prohibiting the purchase of tobacco products by minors are unenforced and, therefore, in the circumstances, useless. Tobacco products are easy for children to obtain because of the lack of regulations governing their sale and distribution, lax attitudes about enforcement, unrestricted free sampling, and the availability of tobacco products from vending machines. As a result, virtually all of those who smoke start before they are legally old enough to buy cigarettes.

The easy availability of tobacco products to children

seriously undermines government and private sector efforts to reduce consumption among this age group. Efforts to prevent children from smoking need to be buttressed by federal, state and local government initiatives to limit the sale of tobacco products to minors. We commend proposals that have been made encouraging state and local actions to combat this problem. However, while commendable, proposals for state and local action must be combined with federal action if we are to effectively combat what clearly is a national crisis. Cigarette smoking among young people requires implementation of a national law, not merely the placing of the entire responsibility on 50 different states to enact and enforce 50 different laws.

All of our nation's children need and deserve equal protection from this deadly and addictive product. Federal action should include a mandated national minimum age, placing the primary enforcement responsibility at the state level, but retaining federal authority to establish minimum standards for those jurisdictions which do not do so on their own. Federal action should also include a prohibition on all free sampling of tobacco products to prevent their distribution to children, as well as a prohibition on the sale of tobacco products except by license and by or under the direct supervision of an individual old enough to legally purchase these products in order to prevent the unrestricted, unsupervised sale of tobacco products in vending machines.

Moreover, we cannot expect to significantly reduce tobacco's toll on our nation if we seek only to prevent children's access to tobacco products. The federal government also needs to address the outrageous efforts of the tobacco industry to market their deadly products to our boys and girls. The tobacco industry spends \$3.27 billion a year -- that's \$9 million a day -- to entice children and adolescents to smoke. The result? At least three thousand minors starting to smoke every day, one thousand or more of whom will die from it.

As long as R.J. Reynolds' cartoon camel (see attachments) and Philip Morris' ever-present Marlboro cowboy are allowed to work their magic on our nation's youth -- promising success, glamor, sexual and athletic prowess, and wealth -- efforts to reduce tobacco use by youth will be frustrated at every turn.

The federal government must do away with the contradictory message sent to our children by eliminating or significantly restricting the image-based advertising used so ingeniously by the tobacco industry to lure our children into lifelong addiction and painful, early death. The federal government also must prohibit tobacco company promotions designed to attract our youth, such as Camel auto racing, Virginia Slims tennis, Marlboro soccer, Parliament rock 'n' roll compact disks, Carlton calculators, the Red Man chewing tobacco Greatest Cowboy Shootout, the Winston Sports Connection Trivia Challenge, the Newport skiing tour, and all manner of free videotapes, baseball

caps, young girls' hairbrushes, dance contests, t-shirts, etc.

We hope that the Surgeon General and the Interagency Committee on Smoking and Health will recommend strong action at all levels of government on these issues. Youth access and the image-based incentives for youths to smoke both must be eliminated.

Until the federal government acts to ensure that tobacco products are no longer readily available and tobacco industry efforts to attract young people are curtailed, efforts to reduce tobacco-related death and disease in our society will be severely hampered.

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